

School of Plant Sciences

News and updates for our SPLS community

May 29, 2024



SPLS graduate students Erica Cortez (left) and Jim Legins (far right), recent enrollees in our graduate programs via ABBS, and members of the Ecosystem Genomics GIDP, join recent graduate Taylor Cavallaro in measuring seedlings at Maricopa Agriculture Center.

What's new in SPLS?

Greetings from Forbes 303C, where I am honored to be working on behalf of the unit as our Interim Director. I'd like to share a few updates with our community. - Betsy Arnold

- Please join me in welcoming our newest faculty member, Ali Mohammed, who will develop an outstanding Extension, research, and service program in Yuma. Dr. Mohammed can be reached by email at alim3@arizona.edu.
- On behalf of our unit, I remain greatly pleased by and grateful to Amanda Stevens and Kevin Teres, who continue to improve our stability, clarity, efficiency, and accuracy in financial matters relevant to the unit. Please stay tuned for major steps forward in reports and funding information in the coming weeks.
- I thank all those who joined us for our informal community gathering at Forbes on the morning of May 17. More than 50 SPLS members and affiliates joined us for refreshments and social interaction. This gathering was held without expense to the unit or college.
- In the coming weeks please stand by for revisions to improve safety in Marley. I thank those faculty, students, and staff who reached out to share concerns and who came together with an array of recommendations that were communicated directly to Jeff Ratje, Dean Burgess, Facilities Management, and our University of Arizona Police Department.

~ Good news ~

Congratulations to Dr. Samantha Orchard, recipient of the 2024 University of Arizona Provost Award for Innovation in Teaching

This prestigious, university-wide award reflects Samantha's excellence in instruction, program development, and student impact. Warmest congratulations, Samantha!

SPLS student recognized with the University's Provost Award and the Award for Exceptional Academic Performance and Service to the Research Mission in CALES

Taylor Cavallaro, the spring 2024 Outstanding Senior for the PLS major, built from his work in research and the Campus Arboretum, winning awards on campus and at regional meetings ahead of initiating his PhD at Stanford in fall.

Read more [here](#).

Two SPLS graduate students recognized as ARCS Scholars

PhD candidates Ciara Garcia and Brooke Sykes were named Scholars through the Phoenix chapter of the ARCS Foundation (Achievement Rewards for College Scientists). These prestigious awards bring financial support and tuition coverage for outstanding members of our graduate community.

Graduate students embark on summer research experiences with the support of the NSF BRIDGES program and related GIDP in Ecosystem Genomics

SPLS students Sallu Nepal, Dakota Salyer, Kiernyn Zizzo, Griffin Davis, and Erica Cortez are engaging in prestigious internship experiences with the USDA, NSF-funded outreach and training programs, and professional development in opportunities ranging from New Hampshire to New Orleans, the US/Mexico ports of entry, and the Smithsonian in Panama.

**HAVE NEWS TO SHARE?
PLEASE LET US KNOW!**

<https://forms.gle/xBbxZMKG5Bkb83eB9>

Priorities on the Interim Director's desk this week

- **Annual Performance Reviews.**

These required reviews are now in process and will be completed in the coming days. Please stay tuned.

- **Promotion, Tenure, and Continuing Status.**

Support for those submitting dossiers is a high priority.

- **Post-tenure Review**

This is a unit requirement that is usually completed in late spring. We will meet this requirement successfully.

- **SPLS Committee Assignments,**

which will follow the committee service poll and will be discussed in person before assignments are finalized.

- **Advancing our understanding of the implications and outcomes of CALES and University budget matters.**

I attended the CALES spring Budget Retreat on behalf of SPLS. We are waiting to learn more – and I will share what I know when I know it.

- **Working on our shared behalf to position SPLS so that we may recruit an outstanding Director at the earliest opportunity.**

My work in this area includes twice-weekly meetings with Amanda and Kevin, plus ad-hoc communication; twice-weekly meetings with Janis Rutherford; at least weekly meetings with members of CALES leadership at the associate dean level; weekly HoDs discussions; monthly check-ins with Shane, plus ad hoc communication; engagement in our core and shared majors and major initiatives; connecting with and positioning SPLS in the viewshed of CALES Development; engagement with regard to SPLS infrastructure and research facilities; engagement with Extension; working to improve transparency, efficiency, trust, and communication; and continuing in the day-to-day adventures of unit (interim) leadership.

Important news for those who submit grant proposals

Jon Chorover and our embeds for pre-award services have put forward a new request to improve the flow of proposal preparation. This includes **new rules** for the timing of the proposal initiation process, and **new tracking and reporting** for those of us who are late with our initiation requests and document submission. These are serious new changes. Please review the slide deck [here](#), with this important infographic below – **especially note the 20-day, 10-day, 8-day, and 3-day deadlines, all of which are business days. Our new SPLS pre-award lead is Alicia Cool, acool1@arizona.edu.**



What's the latest with our website?

As you will have seen, thanks to the work of Rose Brandt and team – and our wonderful SPLS website committee – our new SPLS website is active. Xiong has communicated with the CALES team to ask for editorial access so that we might adjust elements, add our photos, etc. We are asked to wait a bit longer for the team to finalize before we can have access. We will keep on this so that we can represent ourselves well.

Graduate funding update

Graduate student funding, including allocation of TAs and related planning for fall, is moving forward through collaboration between our Director of Graduate Studies, Mark Beilstein, and Kevin Teres. We are working through the unit's financial issues while following our SPLS policies, and recognize the importance of advancing this process promptly. Please stay tuned.

**Do you have questions or concerns?
Please reach out.
Arnold@ag.arizona.edu
520.396.0854**

Special thanks, onboarding for new faculty, and other announcements

- Many faculty members can remember, all too well, the stress of the first year(s) on the job. To this end I'd like to thank Karen, Marc, and Ramin for leading a discussion with our early-career faculty colleagues and helping re-initiate/re-invigorate/work toward our optimal review cycle (including our **first-year review of faculty**, within the unit, and the **required third-year review process**). This initiative was started by Dr. Brown during her interim directorship and it is much appreciated.
- To further aid new faculty in understanding the ins and outs of aspects of their positions, Amanda Stevens has proposed an **onboarding process** that we will enact with current early-career faculty going forward. We hope to clarify procedures, alleviate stress, and improve efficiency for those in the earliest phases of their faculty careers. Details will follow later this summer.
- Our **infrastructure** remains a major concern as we look ahead. I'd like to recognize the efforts of Christopher Portugay-Delaney, who has been a very active advocate for the unit and our needs. I also thank Marc for continuing to maintain a close eye, with members of our faculty and staff, on infrastructure needs.
- **We have several changes in our community coming up, both exciting and bittersweet.** Please see our next newsletter for updates on leaves of absence, retirements, and other announcements.

Opportunity for undergraduates

[The Diana Liverman Scholars Program](#) provides students with experiential and field-based opportunities to develop skills in science communication and environmental storytelling. Scholars will work with a non-profit community partner to enhance their mission and effective practice through communication projects. This year's partners will be the Environmental Defense Fund Youth Water Leadership Coalition and Ishkashitaa Refugee Network.

Liverman Scholars will participate in 3-4 day long/overnight expeditions throughout the year in addition to a weekly skill building workshop and receive mentorship from faculty, graduate student, and peer undergraduate mentors.

Participants will receive 2 academic credits and \$500 per semester. Students from any major with any GPA who have completed at least one college level English course are eligible.

Any questions can be directed to maiaschneider@arizona.edu.

In Memoriam

I am greatly saddened to share the news of the unexpected passing of Dr. Markus Tuller, Professor of Soil Physics in ENVS.

Markus was recognized by the CALES Eminent Researcher Award this past year and was a respected and appreciated member of our community. His 30-year career was impactful in the areas of research, instruction, service, and mentorship, with lasting imprints at national and international levels. He served on committees and collaborated with members of our unit, and was set to retire this month.

We mourn his loss and hope that his memory brings light to those who knew him.

Please remember the many resources available to us here on campus, and beyond, in moments of need: CAPS (520-621-3334, available 24/7); Life and Work Connections; and Ryan Daily in the CALES Life Support Group, available to students and employees (rdaily7@arizona.edu).

Opportunity to nominate Women of Impact at the University of Arizona

Nominate a colleague today! We don't yet have any women from SPLS recognized among those honored as Women of Impact by RII. It's due May 30 but the nomination is brief!

More information:

<https://research.arizona.edu/women#nomination-info>

Nomination:

<https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/4b072d0c96c049e1900209a8ff8e9b44>

Celebrating our SPLS strengths, vol. 1

The School of Plant Sciences has incredible resources. The more we know about them, the more we can share with others. Please read below about our world-class Herbarium, housed in historic Herring Hall, with this update from the vascular plant herbarium shared by Dr. Shelley McMahon.

Highlights from the Herbarium: It's been another busy year in the Herbarium!

Our popular seminar series "Herbarium Lunch" was well attended in person and live-online; visiting speakers shared updates on invasive species, restoration science, the flora of local preserves and far-flung places like New Caledonia, as well as updates on the regional jaguar preserves and the amazing diversity of Arizona bee species (hey, they visit plants!).

Our wonderful students continue to help us take responsibility for new museum specimens, imaging and databasing label data, posting online, and moving the specimens into the stacks. We continue to take in several thousand new accessions per year, many associated with ongoing research projects regarding, e.g., plant phylogenetics, evolution, and systematics, plants on mine tailings, plants that interact with bees, plants that inhabit unique canyons in Sonora, etc. Nineteen dedicated volunteers continue to perform mission-critical activities, from mounting those incoming specimens on archival paper to updating our taxonomy, matching the latest scientific results.

We're the clearing house for tracking phylogenetics and systematics, so if your research subject suddenly has a new scientific name, we can help. We're also popular with courses! Last year, about 15 classes visited for guest lectures and tours. They all learned something substantial about plant biodiversity, and they all heard me remind them that "plants are interesting, and they're not optional!". Our projects this summer include working with the University Library as we prepare to post our library on their system, continuing to support our state's Rare Plant research program, developing a badly needed new website, which will link to the research publications related to the herbarium, and preparing for our annual two-day grass workshop. We've also been engaged in developing a formal "Strategic Plan", which was more fun than it sounds.

If you'd like to hear about our events, to receive our quarterly newsletter, or are just wonder something about plant biodiversity, let us know! Anytime your research includes more than one plant, you've got yourself some plant biodiversity!

Saguaro National Park Service employees processing specimens in the UA Herbarium as part of their ongoing management of the Park's natural resources. Photo: V. Rodriguez, UCATT.

